

## THE CIRCASSIAN EXODUS.

We must go back to a very distant period if we seek a parallel to the flight of the Circassians from their homes to a strange land. From hundreds it increased to thousands, and from thousands to tens of thousands, and then to hundreds of thousands. Lord Stratford de Redcliffe stated at the meeting held at the London Tavern on the 8th of July, that the number of emigrants who had reached Turkish territory exceeded 300,000, and we have good authority for believing that the actual number who have fled from their homes exceeds 400,000; and that, unless the emigration is checked by the news of the sufferings their predecessors have undergone, this number will be still further increased. Anything like precision in the statements made on this point is, however, difficult of attainment; so much so, that we find Mr. Layard stating in the House of Commons, in reply to a question asked by a member of the House, that the estimates varied from 100,000 to 300,000; but he considered the probability was, the real number was about 150,000. Mr. Stevens, our consul At Trebizond, under date the 19th of the same month, says that 25,000 had been landed at Trebizond, and 40,000 at Samsoun; and that 200,000 more were expected, "whom the Russians are said to have insisted should leave their country before the middle of June." The Russians themselves said that the number of those who emigrated in March was 30,000, and that by the end of April there would be upwards of 100,000 more ranged at different points along the Russian coast between Anapa and Sotcha. The report to the Board of Health at Constantinople made by their officer, states that he found at Samsoun between 80,000 and 90,000 emigrants in the town and the encampments, who occupied every place where they could obtain the slightest shelter, and that in a few days this number would be doubled. This, be it remembered, referred to Samsoun alone, and there were sundry other places where they were stationed.

To transport such a multitude as this from Russian to Turkish territory would, under the best system, have been a work of great difficulty, and required a large number of transports; whereas the means at the disposal of the Turkish government were very limited. In addition to the transports they were able to engage for this purpose, they sent some vessels of war, which the Russian government permitted to come to their coast for the purpose, on the condition that they left their armament in Turkey. Lord

Napier, in his despatch to Earl Russell, said that the Grand Duke Michael had asked and received authority to call to his assistance all the Russian vessels of war in the Black Sea, and as many merchant vessels as could be disposed of, for this duty, so as to provide better means of transport for those who were still bent on leaving the country. This information was derived from the Russian Government in St. Petersburg; but the *Invalide Russe* goes beyond this, and says that the Russian Government had sent several vessels of war and transports, and also several private steamers it had chartered for the purpose. Besides which, it had given every encouragement to shipowners of all countries to send vessels to aid in the transportation of the emigrants to Turkish territory. Our Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs is again in collision with the Russian announcements. He says that Russia confined its assistance in this matter to sending four transports. The English Government likewise sent transports; but there is no doubt that all the means of conveyance employed were insufficient to remove them with the expedition desirable, or with a due regard to sanitary considerations; indeed some of these vessels became mere floating pest-houses.

It will enable us to form a better idea of the fearful mortality among these poor creatures, if we refer to what was the state of matters as described by our consul at Trebizond, in his despatches to Earl Russell, written in February last : " The quarters in the vicinity of the cemeteries are rendered uninhabitable owing to the careless manner in which the dead are buried, and the offensive consequences thereof; and whole families are abandoning their dwellings. The chief aqueduct which feeds the fountains of the town is tainted, a Circassian corpse having been found floating therein a few days ago. The streets and squares are in a wretched filthy condition, provisions are getting scarce and dear, and fuel is completely wanting, all which augments the misery, and tends to the spread of disease."

A recently published letter states the number of deaths to be 600 daily. To aggravate the miseries of disease, that of want of food, even of bread, was added; the fear of catching the disease causing the bakers to close their shops and fly from the pest-stricken town. The same dread caused all who were able among the inhabitants to do likewise; and some of those who could not leave the place, laid in a stock of provisions and shut themselves up as in a prison. Among the diseases which swept them off were

small-pox, typhus fever, and dysentery. The account given by Dr. Barozzi in his report to the Board of Health at Constantinople of the state of things in this respect which he found at Samsoun at about the same time, is the most revolting that can be imagined, and more than confirms Mr. Stevens' statements. From the description he gives, we are led to believe that the emigrants are of an indolent character, and have no regard for cleanliness. We must make great allowance for the acts of people brought to death's door by starvation; and it is scarcely to be wondered at, that, under such circumstances, they should conceal the bodies of those who had died, for the purpose of continuing to draw the scanty rations allowed to each individual a few days longer. For this, disgusting and dangerous as it was when the corpse was kept concealed in the tent among the living for days and days after it ought to have been underground, we can find some excuse; but there is a total absence of every feeling of decency and respect for the dead shown in the fact, that they rooted out the bodies of those who were buried for the sake of getting possession of the piece of calico which served as their shroud. They did not even take the trouble to put the bodies back into the holes from whence they had taken them, but left them exposed in the open fields. That fathers and mothers should have endeavoured to mitigate their own sufferings by the sale of their children, is only what might have been expected, considering that we have always been led to believe that it is from this source that the markets of the East are chiefly supplied; but if ever there was an excuse to be found for such conduct, it is in the present instance. Moreover, it was an act of mercy to the children, who were thereby saved from the privations to which their parents were subjected. To feed such an immense multitude as this day after day would exceed the resources of almost any nation. The Sultan has acted with great liberality, for out of his private purse he is said to have contributed 50,000. Our Government sent them 600 tons of biscuit; and no doubt if this act were repeated again and again, public opinion would sanction this irregular appropriation of our stores; though, considering the sympathy expressed for the victims of Russian policy, the British public has not displayed its usual liberality.

On the 27th of May it was announced that a committee had been formed, consisting of Lord Stratford de Redcliffe, Lord Shaftesbury, the Marquis Clanricarde, Mr. Oliphant, and several others, for the purpose of receiving subscriptions in aid of the Circassian exiles, and 2000. have been sent already.

The disposal of such a vast number must necessarily be a work of time and extreme difficulty. A small number have been sent to serve with the Turkish troops in Syria; and a report was prevalent on the Continent that a convention had been signed between France and Turkey, according to which from 25,000 to 30,000 men were to be sent off straight to Algeria.

This statement has not been confirmed, and is indeed a very improbable one. It is not to be supposed that Turkey would enter into an engagement which would burden her with a multitude of helpless paupers; unless, indeed, the agreement provided that these men should be accompanied by their families; on this point, however, the continental journals are silent. A portion of the emigrants were billeted upon Turkish families, in the proportion of one Circassian family to four Turkish families.

This is naturally regarded by Sir Henry Bulwer as a most unsatisfactory arrangement; it is cheap, and that is all that can be said in favour of it; to the poor Turks it is intolerably oppressive. Forty thousand were sent to the shores of the Danube; but of these not less than six thousand are said to have died within three weeks, and the survivors are many of them absolutely destitute of covering, and almost starved to death.

The plan which Sir Henry Bulwer proposes is to settle the Circassians in the country which extends from the Black Sea towards Erzerum; to hold it by a kind of military tenure. This plan he considers would be doubly beneficial — it would relieve the native agricultural population from a great part of the drain made upon them by the demands of the army, and would furnish the means of carrying out a work of great importance to the future prosperity of Turkey.

The work to which Sir Henry here refers is the construction of a road from Trebizond to Erzerum. It is by this route that the commerce between the port of Trebizond and Central Asia, Armenia, and Persia is carried on; and anything more detestable can hardly be imagined. Supposing a good road to be made in accordance with our ambassador's suggestion, the increase of traffic would be prodigious; and no doubt would greatly increase our imports of manufactured goods into the countries it would

traverse. Of course this proposition has been received by a portion of the foreign press as another instance of the far-sighted selfish policy of England, which not only looks forward to an increase of her trade which would result from its adoption, but to increased employment for her shipping, most of the commerce of the port with foreign countries being carried on in British ships. It is however constrained to admit that British selfishness is on this occasion in accordance with the interests of a very large number of people.

There is another consideration in connection with this route which diplomatists may consider of some importance. Allusions have often been made with respect to the motives of the Russians for expelling the Circassians being associated with future designs on Persia and other countries in the direction of India. Whatever her ultimate designs may be, they do not at present appear to extend beyond an increased commercial intercourse. To this end the Russian government in the Caucasus, according to the Russian official paper, has, under the personal superintendence of the Grand Duke Michael, begun to open up communications between the Valley of the Kouban and the country on the opposite side of the mountains. The soldiery are employed in making roads, and there seems to be a desire to facilitate in every possible way the commercial intercourse between the Russian port of Poti and Western Asia. On this subject the *Journal des Debats* says, "The desire of Russia is to unite the Black Sea to the Caspian by a commercial route, so as to draw to the Russian port of Poti on the Black Sea the whole of the commerce which at the present moment has its centre at Trebizond; to ruin Turkey commercially by depriving it of the commerce between eastern Europe and western Asia, and at the same time to turn and weaken her military defences by occupying the whole coast of the Black Sea to the borders of Trebizond." Whether it is in hope of increased commercial intercourse, or dread of future aggression, the Persian Government had no sooner heard of the complete subjugation of the Caucasian tribes, than she sent an Ambassador Extraordinary to Tiflis to congratulate the Russian Commander-in-Chief, the Grand Duke Michael, on his very great success.

With respect to the money that would be required to carry out Sir Henry's project, he proposes to raise it by a loan of 1,500,000l., to be subscribed in England and France,

the interest on which would not exceed 100,000<sup>2</sup>. a year; and as a guarantee for the payment of this interest, he proposes an assignment of the revenues arising from the commerce of the port of Trebizond. This proposition of his has been favourably received by our Government, and is supported by the French minister in Constantinople and the Minister for Foreign Affairs in France. It appears to possess the advantages of being wholly unobjectionable in itself, calculated to promote the prosperity of Turkey and of all nations trading with her, and quite feasible of execution; to say nothing of the incidental recommendation that its adoption is likely to defeat some of the calculations made by Russia with the view of benefiting by the grievous wrong she has inflicted on a whole people.

Considering the moderation observed in the wording of official communications by English representatives, we may form a pretty clear idea of what our ambassador's feeling is with respect to the causes of the Circassian emigration. Sir H. Bulwer, writing from Constantinople under date of April 12, 1864, says: —

"The continued advance of the Russians in Circassia, and the ill-treatment experienced by the natives from the Russian troops, have led to an almost complete emigration from the country; 25,000 have already reached Trebizond, and others are endeavouring to escape in small boats at every risk... The loss of life which is occasioned by their hazardous attempts to escape from their conquerors is shocking to humanity."

Lord Napier called the attention of the Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs to the subject, and the reply he received from Prince Gortschakoff was, that the Imperial Government regretted, but could not help it; that it was absolutely necessary to remove them from their mountain fastnesses, but that a fair offer had been made to all of them to settle on lands in the plain, which they had rejected. She also proposed to those who were fitted for military service to enter the regular army or the militia. The term of enlistment was to be for four years, with the option at the end of that time of retiring from the service or of re-enlisting for a like period. They were to receive their clothing, rations, and so forth, like the Russians themselves, and on quitting the service they were to be exempt from imposts for the remainder of their lives. The pay

was to be seventeen roubles a-year for a private, and thirty for non-commissioned officers.

The Moscow Gazette says the transportation (it uses the milder term of transplantation, as though it were speaking of cabbages or some other vegetable, and not of creatures of flesh and blood) of the Circassians, which is now being effected, is not at all the result of an inveterate and implacable hatred of the Russians towards these mountaineers. Every possible system has been tried in the Caucasus; they tried to attract the natives by commercial advantages, by heaping favours on the principal men of the tribes, and propagating civilisation among them; they strengthened the hands of the chiefs to maintain, by their intermediation, order among the nation; they introduced self- government, and tried to propagate the Mahomedan religion among them, but nothing succeeded.

" Then, and then only, did the Russian Government adopt the present system. After occupying the territory of such or such a tribe, it said to the natives, ' Betake yourselves to the plains, where you will have lands given to you among the Russian colonies, or else depart to any other part of the world you please, for you cannot remain here among your forests and mountains, because if we were to go away to-day you would take up arms again to morrow. Western publicists do not approve this system. Let them think what they will. We choose to adopt it because we have found it successful in putting an end to a war which seemed interminable. We grant that this emigration of whole tribes is an extraordinary phenomenon, and that it is more easy to attribute it to our cruelty than to seek for its real cause. Those who like may content them selves with this explanation."

The Invalide Russe does not imitate this defiant tone towards public opinion throughout Europe, but endeavours to excuse the conduct of the Government by attributing to the natives an obstinate hatred of Russia. It says, " The obstinate abuse of Russia persisted in for so many years, and the repugnance to remain under our rule which the tribes now departing to Turkish territory have manifested, relieve us, morally, from all care concerning them; nevertheless, considering the absolute submission they have recently expressed, and perceiving that they were really

incapable of understanding their true interests, his Imperial Highness has deigned to take all possible measures to relieve their position." And within the last few days the same journal said, " It would be difficult to cite a State which has acted with greater disinterestedness and generosity than Russia has recently shown in the Caucasus."

If to attack villages and massacre every human being in them, sparing neither the old man nor the little child, neither the mother nor her whose infant was yet unborn; to cleave the heads of dead warriors from their bodies, and kick them through the streets as though they were rotten melons; to level huts with the ground, and make what had been the happy homes of a brave and gallant race an abode for wild animals and birds of prey,\* are proofs of generosity and disinterestedness, then indeed Russia has manifested these qualities. But it is difficult to imagine what Russian journals are not capable of asserting when we find them, in the face of the overwhelming evidence possessed by every nation in Europe to the contrary, averring that " the situation of the mountaineers on our coast is far from being as frightful as foreign journals represent; they are suffering from no calamity nor any privation other than those inseparable from emigration, and no epidemic malady exists among them besides small -pox, which was raging among them when they were living in their old homes." We find nearly the same statement attributed to the Grand Duke Michael in Lord Napier's despatch, and he says further, that the misery and disease among them did not begin until after they had landed on Turkish territory, and was due to the mismanagement of Turkish officials.

\* Vide Parliamentary Papers

One great cause of the ease with which Russia has stamped out a warlike race, so powerful in point of numbers and so accustomed to war, is the disunion which prevailed among them. Wanting a chief capable of subduing all the numerous tribes in succession, and compelling them to unite in a combined resistance against the Russians, they frittered away their strength in conflicts with each other, and thus enabled the common enemy to reduce tribe after tribe. As in other mountainous countries, the people of which have been subjugated, this result could not have been achieved if they had not practised that most powerful aid to an invader, the exaction of

blood for blood from each other. In the present case, in addition to this source of weakness, they had suffered much from famine, from the entire failure of their crops, and the murrain which swept away the greater part of their cattle.

Thoroughly to complete the subjugation of the wretched inhabitants who remained in the mountains, an organised invasion was made subsequent to that described at page 7 of the Papers presented to Parliament. In only one place did the Russians meet with resistance. They found the villages either desolate, or, where they were not completely so, the few who remained were making their last preparations for departure.

"At this moment," says the Invalide, vauntingly, "there does not remain in the Western Caucasus a single tribe which has not submitted to our rule, and consequently, Caucasian wars are no longer possible."

There appears to be no doubt that this, assertion, at any rate, is undeniable, for Consul Dickson says that the desolation of the country is most expressively described by the local saying, that "even a woman might now-a-days travel from Soudjouk-Kalé as far as Anapa without fear of meeting a single human being."

The view which the Russians take of the result of their operations in the Caucasus is one of unmitigated satisfaction. In an order of the day issued by the Grand Duke Michael Nicolaievitch, Commander-in-chief of the Army of the Caucasus, he says, —

"Soldiers of the Caucasian Army. — It is with sentiments of sincere pleasure, and of high esteem for your valour, that I congratulate you on the conquest of the Western Caucasus, and the termination of Caucasian warfare. By your intrepidity in battle, the unexampled endurance of fatigue and excessive privations, you have rendered an immense service to the sovereign and the country; neither the savage horrors of inaccessible mountain dens, nor the desperate resistance of their inhabitants, neither biting cold nor torrid heat, nothing has been able to resist your progress; during long years you have surmounted all without being discouraged, and you have attained the goal, in marking every stage with your sweat and blood.

" Let thanks be rendered to the All-Powerful, who has crowned your efforts! Glory and gratitude of the country to you, the conquerors of the Caucasus! Eternal honour to the memory of your fallen comrades at this happy and solemn moment!

(Signed)

The Commander-in-chief of the Army of the Caucasus, Grand Master of the Artillery.

" Michael."

The Emperor sent Orders to the Grand Duke and those principally concerned in carrying out the military operations; a gold sabre, enriched with diamonds, with the inscription, "For having three times crossed the principal chain of the Caucasus," falling to the lot of General Grabbe. A similar token of his acknowledgment was sent by the Emperor to the Grand Duke Michael's predecessor, Prince Alexander Bariatinsky, together with an autograph letter thanking him for the services he had rendered in planning the scheme which had been successful in terminating a bloody war that had raged for a century and a half.

A grand religious celebration took place at Tiflis on the 21st of June, for the purpose of thanking the Almighty for crowning their efforts with victory. The principal functionaries took advantage of the opportunity to present their congratulations to the Grand Duke; the mayor presenting, in addition, a carved antique cross of cypress wood, containing relics of St. George the Martyr. After the termination of the religious service a solemn procession started from the Sion Cathedral to the tent prepared for the celebration of the Te Deum. This procession consisted of the Exarch of Georgia and a number of the clergy, preceded by crosses and banners. Before, however, they commenced the thanksgiving, the Exarch delivered a congratulatory address.

At the conclusion of the address, the performance of the Te Deum, and the Grand Duke's reply, all the bells in the city rang out joyful peals, the soldiers shouted, and the artillery shook the town with repeated discharges.

Nor was this the only religious service held to testify the gratitude of the Russians for

their victory. At Moscow, St. Petersburg, and else where, similar solemnities were performed, and the most exuberant joy manifested. Thus, while their wretched victims were lying in herds of thousands, poisoning the very air about them with the exhalations from their festering bodies, the Russians were thanking God with more or less sincerity for their success.

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